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Electronic Poll Books

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Thousands of jurisdictions—counties, cities, towns, villages—administer elections in the United States. Occasionally a trend emerges, as various jurisdictions in several states begin to make use of a certain innovation or technology. Electronic poll books (e-poll books) represent one such trend.

An e-poll book replaces the traditional paper poll book—the roster of eligible voters in a precinct or district. An e-poll book typically looks like a tablet or a laptop computer and allows poll workers to look up voters similar to a Google search instead of thumbing through an alphabetical list of names.

A variety of e-poll books are available for purchase, and many jurisdictions design their own. An e-poll book typically provides one or more of the following functions:

- Allows poll workers to look up voters from the entire county or even the state. This can reduce voter check-in time, one of the bottlenecks in the voting process.
- Allows poll workers to easily redirect voters to their correct polling place.
- Scans a driver's license to pull up a voter's information, avoiding data entry errors.
- Notifies poll workers if a voter already voted absentee or during the early voting period.
- Allows voters to sign in electronically.
- Automatically produces turnout numbers and lists of who voted.
- Uses a photo to verify a voter's identity. Although this could be used to prevent voter fraud, it is not yet in place anywhere.

In response to long lines at some polling places during the 2012 election, President Obama established the bipartisan [Presidential Commission on Election Administration](#) to identify best practices in election administration. The commission's [report](#), issued in January 2014, recommended that jurisdictions make the transition to e-poll books. "In the national survey of election officials, e-poll books was one of the most frequently identified innovations that respondents desired," the report states.

State Action

E-poll books were deployed statewide in 2006 in Georgia and Maryland, and these remain the only two states to use them in every jurisdiction. Jurisdictions in [30 states](#) currently use e-poll books.

As e-poll books become more common, states are beginning to grapple with legislation to authorize their use. Security and the integrity of the data contained within e-poll books are important concerns, and legislators are considering functions and security features to be

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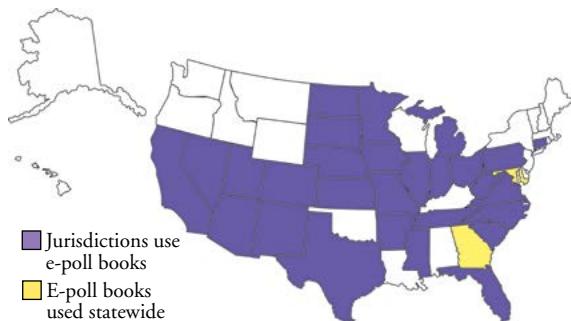
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included in e-poll books used in the state. They also are considering processes to test how well e-poll books function and to determine how to certify them.

Voting systems—the machines used to cast and tabulate votes—have long been subject to various federal and state testing requirements. These tests verify that the systems function as they should and that they meet standards for security, performance, accessibility and usability. When a system meets the stated requirements, it can be certified for use in the state. Should e-poll books, which are not directly involved with casting and counting votes, be subject to similar testing and certification requirements? The answer in some states is “yes.”

States with Jurisdictions that Use E-Poll Books



Source: NCSL, 2014.

- In 2013, Indiana was the first to establish standards for e-poll books in law and to establish a process for testing, certifying and regularly renewing their certification. The state partners with [Ball State University](#) to test all voting equipment, including [e-poll books](#).
- [Virginia Code](#) requires the State Board of Elections to approve e-poll books before they can be used in the state.
- Rather than setting specific statutory requirements for e-poll books, 2013 legislation in Ohio directed the secretary of state to issue rules and [advisories](#) regarding e-poll book examination, testing and use.
- In Pennsylvania, the secretary of state must certify e-poll books based on the [statutory requirement](#) that “the computer list shall be in a form prescribed by the Secretary.”

At least two states outline requirements for e-poll books in administrative rule:

- Arizona published guidance for use of e-poll books in the [Secretary of State's Elections Procedures Manual](#), which has the effect of law pursuant to Arizona statute.
- In Georgia, regulations for use of e-poll books appear in the [Rules and Regulations of the State of Georgia](#).

Minnesota and Wisconsin conducted studies on the feasibility of using e-poll books:

- After a successful 2013 pilot project testing e-poll books in some jurisdictions, the Minnesota Legislature recently passed a [bill](#) that authorizes their use statewide and outlines specific standards that e-poll books must meet.
- In contrast, Wisconsin's Government Accountability Board recently conducted a thorough [study of e-poll books](#) and decided not to authorize their use in the state at this time.

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[NCSL's Electronic Poll Book Webpage](#)